

# MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE PRESENTS 'POETS OF PANDAEMONIUM: THE CINEMA OF DEREK JARMAN AND HUMPHREY JENNINGS'

February 8–17, 2019

Astoria, New York, January 23, 2019—From February 8 through 17, 2019, Museum of the Moving Image will present [\*Poets of Pandaemonium: The Cinema of Derek Jarman and Humphrey Jennings\*](#), a partial dual retrospective that allows these two English filmmakers' work to be experienced in juxtaposition. Jennings (1907–1950) was a pioneering documentarian who captured life during wartime and the immediate postwar period, while Jarman's (1942–1994) iconoclastic films addressed late-twentieth-century queer life. Organized by guest curator Max Carpenter, the screening series looks at the two directors—and their reactions to the external and internal turmoils of their ages—through seven pairings. Of particular note, this February marks 25 years since Jarman's death. Many of the films will be presented in rare imported 35mm prints and restored DCPs. The series will also be presented at Harvard Film Archive from January 25 through February 11.

The films of Humphrey Jennings and Derek Jarman are separated by a gulf of decades, decades in which their native Britain metamorphosed from a world power into a melancholy little island. They were both radical in their employment of audiovisual montage, non-professional actors, and their frequent use of recited poetry, though Jennings utilized these techniques in the espousal of his signature brand of optimistic patriotism, while Jarman was preoccupied by the psychological strife of late-twentieth-century queer life. The two artists shared a detached skepticism of the cinematic medium; as dually accomplished abstract painters, skilled theatrical designers, and acclaimed authors, they saw the cinema as only one facet of their voluminous oeuvres. Such a detachment may have been the secret ingredient to the success of their distinctive, and at times shockingly parallel, film experiments.

Jarman is known to have encountered the work of Jennings during his time as a student at University College of London's Slade School of Fine Art in the mid-1960s, notably during the lectures of Jennings's former friend and colleague Thorold Dickinson. There is no way of confirming that cinematic monuments like *Listen to Britain* (1942) and *Fires Were Started* (1943) made lasting impressions on the developing artist, but Jarman was a staunchly individual spirit who eschewed postmodern cinephilic reference points and was more likely to be influenced by a Coil

record or a Shakespeare play than another film. This is all to say that the seven cinematic pairings in this dual retrospective are speculative, and that it is likely the case that the filmmakers' tendencies toward nonconformity are what directed them down similar paths of expression.

The world of Jennings's films is the world of the liberal masses fighting against fascism, their culture persisting through the ages, surviving the 'Pandaemonium' of war and industry. (*Pandaemonium* is the title of Jennings's unfinished book of observations on the industrial revolution.) Derek Jarman painted on his cinematic canvas a mishmash of atomized emotions and a decaying national culture, and thus his world is an internal one, a world whose pleasures lie in the flesh and the sublime and whose Pandaemonium results from the traumas of unrequited love and a repressed culture. Jennings died tragically in 1950 at the age of 43 after falling off a cliff while scouting a film in Greece, and Jarman succumbed to AIDS half a century later in 1994 at the age of 52. The tragedies of their early deaths still reverberate through film culture as their legacies grow more influential with each new generation of film artists. As masterful audiovisual craftsmen, a review of their oeuvres (both together and separately) is always in order, and this partial retrospective features many new and recent restorations of their most brilliant works.

### **SCHEDULE FOR 'POETS OF PANDAEMONIUM: THE CINEMA OF DEREK JARMAN AND HUMPHREY JENNINGS,' FEBRUARY 8–17, 2019**

All screenings take place in the Sumner M. Redstone Theater or the Celeste Armand Bartos Screening Room at Museum of the Moving Image, 36-01 35 Ave, Astoria, New York, 11106. Ticket purchase includes same-day admission to the Museum. Unless stated, tickets are \$15 (\$11 seniors and students / \$9 youth ages 3–17 / Free or discounted for Museum members). Advance tickets are available online at [movingimage.us](http://movingimage.us)

#### ***Blue + Listen to Britain***

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 7:00 P.M.

***Blue*** Dir. Derek Jarman. 1993, 79 mins. DCP courtesy of James Mackay/Zeitgeist. Preceded by ***Listen to Britain*** Dir. Humphrey Jennings. 1942, 20 mins. 35mm print source: BFI. Both Jennings and Jarman were dead-set on pushing the envelope of accepted film form, and as it happens their respective magna opera jettison the aural components of cinema to the forefront, with Jarman going as far as to eliminate all but a solid palette of rich blue from the visual realm, and Jennings (along with co-director Stewart McAllister) eschewing the conventional ubiquity of the voiceover in favor of an ethnographic immersion in tableaux of wartime Britain.

#### ***Angelic Conversation + Words for Battle***

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 4:30 P.M.

***Angelic Conversation*** Dir. Derek Jarman. 1985, 77 mins. DCP source: BFI. Preceded by ***Words for Battle*** Dir. Humphrey Jennings. 1941, 8 mins. 35mm print source: BFI. *Words for Battle* and *Angelic Conversation* are quiet works of contemplation whose expressionistic visual montages are backgrounded by the reading of poetry. In *Words for Battle* the reader of works by Milton,

Blake, Kipling, and others is a young Laurence Olivier. Meanwhile in *Angelic Conversation*, Judi Dench reads Shakespeare's deeply personal sonnets. Jennings's aim was the stoking of British patriotism while Jarman pursued a personal poetics, but both explore the marriage of poetry and film with a masterfully soft touch.

***The Last of England + The Dim Little Island***

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 6:30 P.M.

***The Last of England*** Dir. Derek Jarman. 1987, 92 mins. 35mm print source: Metropolis Kino. Preceded by ***The Dim Little Island*** Dir. Humphrey Jennings. 1949, 10 mins. 35mm print source: BFI. Humphrey Jennings's *The Dim Little Island* is an anomaly of post-war melancholy sprinkled with a feigned optimism for the perseverance of the British spirit. Jennings films Ford Madox Brown's painting *The Last of England* and empty smoke-filled cathedrals while composer and narrator Ralph Vaughan Williams predicts that the contemporaneous decline of Britain as a world power will bring about a future of unprecedented artistic expression. Who could deny Williams's prophesying genius when such an unprecedented artistic collaboration as that of Derek Jarman and his composer Simon Fisher Turner lay on the distant horizon with their own monumental *The Last of England*?

***In The Shadow of the Sun + The Birth of the Robot***

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 7:00 P.M.

***In The Shadow of the Sun*** Dir. Derek Jarman. 1981, 51 mins. DCP source: Basilisk Communications. Preceded by ***The Birth of the Robot*** Dir. Len Lye. 1936, 6 mins. 16mm print source: Nga Taonga Sound & Vision. Len Lye's and Humphrey Jennings's collaborative work *The Birth of the Robot* and Jarman's Super-8 montage *In the Shadow of the Sun* are otherworldly audiovisual artifacts. One of Jennings's few ventures into color filmmaking (he later denounced color as antithetical to his documentary experimentation), *Robot* is a bizarre advertisement for Shell Oil in which surrealist stop-motion figurines act out a disjointed myth of how robots came to be. (It involves a psychedelic drive through the Egyptian desert and some incredible montage of rainbow color plates and cartoon skulls to the soundtrack of Gustav Holst's Planets symphony.) *In the Shadow of the Sun* has a markedly similar palette to Lye/Jennings's *Robot*, and also makes occultist use of skulls and pyramids in its sublime overlaid montages. Its droning score by Throbbing Gristle is the film's pulsating heart, and as such it is one of the more collaborative features in Jarman's oeuvre. (Note: Humphrey Jennings's creative role in Lye's film is a source of continued debate. Many descriptions relegate him to the level of a stop-motion figurine maker, but he is also listed as in charge of 'color direction and production,' and there is reason to think he may have been an uncredited co-director.)

***Sebastiane + The Silent Village***

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 7:00 P.M.

***Sebastiane*** Dir. Derek Jarman. 1976, 86 mins. Restored DCP source: BFI. Preceded by ***The Silent Village*** Dir. Humphrey Jennings. 1943, 36 mins. 35mm print source: BFI. Jennings, like many early propagandists, was a filmmaker for the masses. His films aimed to encourage liberal populism and patriotism against the very real threat of fascism. Jarman was less interested in the masses than in individual experience, in which world the threat of unrequited love can wreak a similar fascistic havoc. As such, Jennings's seminal docudrama *The Silent*

*Village* (which relocates the Lidice Massacre to a Welsh mining town) and Jarman's *Sebastiane* (which recontextualizes the ancient story of Saint Sebastian as a homoerotic tragedy) offer intriguing parallel narratives in which enemies gradually knock away at the gates of freedom. *The Silent Village* and *Sebastiane* also position Jennings and Jarman as formidable directors of non-professional ensemble casts.

***War Requiem + The True Story of Lili Marlene***

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 7:00 P.M.

***War Requiem*** Dir. Derek Jarman. 1989, 92 mins. 35mm print source: BFI. Preceded by ***The True Story of Lili Marlene*** Dir. Humphrey Jennings. 1944, 21 mins. 35mm print source: BFI. Two haunting musical works, both based on poetry of the Great War, form the respective backbones of Jennings's *Lili Marlene* and Jarman's *War Requiem*. Jennings's episodic docudrama tells the story of both the WWII-era song "Lili Marleen" and its singer Lale Andersen as the War ravages on, making for a tantalizing blend of contemporary history, some of Jennings's most powerful battle footage, and a heartstring-pulling tale of the perseverance of the human spirit through music. Jarman's *War Requiem* is at its core a poetic music video for Benjamin Britten's titular mass, and the most persistent visual thread is the story of the poet Wilfred Owen (played by Nathaniel Parker) and his tribulations during World War I. Music, battle, and, as always, British identity are at the forefront for both filmmakers. (*War Requiem* also features Laurence Olivier, who 48 years earlier had narrated for Jennings, in his final screen role.)

***Jubilee + Fires Were Started***

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 6:00 P.M.

***Jubilee*** Dir. Derek Jarman. 1978, 106 mins. DCP source: BFI. Preceded by ***Fires Were Started*** Dir. Humphrey Jennings. 1943, 63 mins. 35mm print source: BFI. Humphrey Jennings's only feature film is a docudrama centered around a real group of heroic firefighters as they extinguish the destructive blazes of war; Derek Jarman's *Jubilee* follows a group of nihilistic punks who love nothing more than to set anything ablaze. In both films the spirit and mettle of the directors' respective Britains are on display, and Jennings's heart-heavy optimism is starkly opposed by Jarman's bitterness. A mythic inferno opposes the British spirit, but may also be the only way to access it as it slips away, and both *Fires Were Started* and *Jubilee* explore this in contrasting but similar ensemble narratives.

###

**Press contact:** Tomoko Kawamoto, [tkawamoto@movingimage.us](mailto:tkawamoto@movingimage.us) / 718 777 6830  
Screeners and images are available for most of the films in the series.

**MUSEUM INFORMATION**

**Museum of the Moving Image** ([movingimage.us](http://movingimage.us)) advances the understanding, enjoyment, and appreciation of the art, history, technique, and technology of film, television, and digital media. In its stunning facility—acclaimed for both its accessibility and bold design—the Museum presents exhibitions; screenings of significant works; discussion programs featuring actors, directors, craftspeople, and business leaders; and education programs which serve more than 50,000 students each year. The Museum also houses a significant collection of moving-image artifacts.

Hours: Wed–Thurs, 10:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m. Fri, 10:30 a.m.–8:00 p.m. Sat–Sun, 10:30 a.m.–6:00 p.m.

Museum Admission: \$15 adults; \$11 senior citizens (ages 65+) and students (ages 18+) with ID; \$9 youth (ages 3–17). Children under 3 and Museum members are admitted free. Admission to the galleries is free on Fridays, 4:00 to 8:00 p.m.

Film Screenings: Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, and as scheduled. Unless otherwise noted, tickets: \$15 adults, \$11 students and seniors, \$9 youth (ages 3–17), free or discounted for Museum members (depending on level of membership). Advance purchase is available online. Ticket purchase may be applied toward same-day admission to the Museum's galleries.

Location: 36-01 35 Avenue (at 37 Street) in Astoria.

Subway: M or R to Steinway Street. N or W to 36 Ave or Broadway.

Program Information: Telephone: 718 777 6888; Website: [movingimage.us](http://movingimage.us)

Membership: <http://movingimage.us/support/membership> or 718 777 6877

Museum of the Moving Image is housed in a building owned by the City of New York and has received significant support from the following public agencies: New York City Department of Cultural Affairs; New York City Council; New York City Economic Development Corporation; New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature; Institute of Museum and Library Services; National Endowment for the Humanities; National Endowment for the Arts; and Natural Heritage Trust (administered by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation). For more information, please visit [movingimage.us](http://movingimage.us).